OPINION

BY RAFIA ZAKARIA

Pound of flesh

ONE would think that everyone in the world knows that nothing is free. Every favour granted, every kindness bestowed has its cost — sometimes the payment is demanded immediately, and at other times, decades later. Europe it appears is only learning the truth of this in these feverish days of the Trump administration. Recently, the Americans carted off Nicol s Maduro and his wife from Caracas to a jailhouse in America. Careful statements came from Europe so as not to anger the American president.

It was the words that came after that were even more unnerving to the watching Europeans. No sooner had images of a handcuffed Maduro appeared on TV screens than the Trump administration officials began to assert that they would take over Greenland next. Post-Maduro, one of the first to make the claim was Stephen Miller — Trump's Goebbels-esque immigration czar. Then it was Trump himself and also Secretary of State Marco Rubio who said that the US would not militarily take over Greenland but simply buy the country. Controlling Greenland, all three seemed to agree, was necessary for America's security.

If Venezuela's takeover had instigated panic attacks in Europe, these overt announcements of US plans brought on a nervous breakdown. The major European countries issued a statement against the claims to Greenland being made across the pond. At the centre of the circle was Denmark, which had laid claim to Greenland 300 years ago and still wants to hold on to it even though Greenlanders themselves do not seem to want it to do so.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has since had increasingly testy exchanges with President Donald Trump. In her words, if the US were to 'get' Greenland it would be the end of the international world order.

The reality is more complex and the source of Danish fretting over every word the US says about Greenland is ironically an international treaty or a series of treaties themselves. The first dates to 1941. At that time, the Danish ambassador who had been cut off from Copenhagen owing to the Nazi takeover of Denmark signed a defence agreement on behalf of Denmark and Greenland with the then US administration.

The motivation behind this was that the Nazis could have used Greenland as a route to North America and thus it made sense for the US to be able to set up military bases there. Another treaty is from 1951 when the US looking to bolster its Cold War defences against the Soviet Union got permission to set up any number of military bases in Greenland if it wanted to.

The US is a military behemoth with a defence budget of over $900 billion. Even as Denmark's PM dramatically decries US claims on Greenland it seems questionable whether the rest of Europe will forsake the US as a military ally over Greenland. The promise of American military support has enabled Europe to keep up a lifestyle it could not afford had European countries been required to spend gobs of money fending off a threat from the then Soviet Union. The social welfare state, free schools and healthcare for citizens, for instance, would not have been possible if military spending had not been defrayed by Nato.

The cuddly US that never raised a finger at Europe's indulgent domestic spending is now gone. In its place is a nasty America looking to get paid for past favours. Many in Washington predict that the US plan to thwart China is to simply get a tighter grip on South and Central America as well as most of the rest of the Western Hemisphere. Greenland, sitting on enormous mineral deposits, is part of America's new security strategy. This means that even if there is no dramatic or overt capture of Greenland, it is likely that a takeover will take place quietly.

> The cuddly US that indulged Europe's domestic spending has gone.

Beyond Venezuela, the US also has its eyes on the area known as the 'lithium triangle' constituting Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. The Argentinian prime minister has already sung Trump's praises. Given Maduro's fate, his regional counterparts know they better follow suit. America is intent on making sure it has enough oil, precious metals and other components required for technological advancements and it's not afraid to use its military to make sure it gets just that.

Greenland with its 57,000 inhabitants is likely about to exchange the hegemony of one state for another's. The Trump administration sees no reason why an icy hinterland of buried treasure should not be theirs. Europe, which had counted on the US remaining a friend forever, is in for a dark and disappointing time ahead. The US wants what it wants and it is Europe's turn to realise this. ■

The writer is an attorney teaching constitutional law and political philosophy.
rafia.zakaria@gmail.com

BY MOHAMMAD ALI BABAKHEL

Colonial romance

TO strengthen the criminal justice system, Peshawar High Court directed police to implement a pilot project in Peshawar. CJS components — police, prosecution, prison (mainly a provincial domain) and courts — work under higher courts. Article 10A guarantees fair trial; Article 37 ensures inexpensive, swift justice. National Action Plan's point 20 and revised NAP's Point 12 list CJS reform but there's been little effort on this front.

Post-9/11 and post-devolution, isolated initiatives, like converting 'B' into 'A' areas, instead of showing reform efficacy, saw reversals or amendments. Currently, CJS often treats victims as complainants. CJS reform needs a diagnostic approach — identifying hurdles like financial constraints and little public support. Reforms also aim to improve justice standards. Romancing a colonial legacy, corruption, lack of will, weak political manifestation, absence of a transparent, instant complaint disposal apparatus and public oversight, rigidity and weak coordination hinder reform — each CJS component wants to operate independently, not under public oversight. Forces within society and CJS committed to maintaining the status quo offer resistance to reform. Working classes bear the brunt of CJS flaws, with little voice in reform deliberations. An integrated approach is needed.

An effective CJS evolves; this one is like a custodian of a colonial past; it's averse to new stakeholders to help with policy reforms and oversight. Stakeholders include CSOs, mental health professionals, restorative justice facilitators, tech companies including social media platforms, human rights bodies, victims' advocates, think tanks, and donors. Lodging false FIRs and witness non-cooperation burden CJS. Usually investigators follow the outlined FIR track but it can create ambiguity. Investigators must be trained to have independent mindsets.

CJS reform faces financial constraints and weak forensic support. Increased crime, terrorism and media sensationalism weaken efforts. Manipulation of medico-legal reports negatively impacts justice, hence transparency and independent oversight are necessary. Outdated classification of cognisable and non-cognisable offences hampers police performance, delays justice, and enables corruption. The nature of crime has changed but rigid classification keeps victims shuttling between courts and police, reducing public trust in CJS.

Though police and judges' salaries have gone up, is the increase proportional to improved efficiency and decrease in corruption? With hundreds of laws, the issue is not of enactment but enforcement mostly carried out without input from stakeholders, leading to a 130th ranking in the rule of law index.

Even after separating prosecution from police, case files shuttle between investigators and prosecutors for months. It must be assessed if prosecution quality and conviction rates have improved after making prosecution a separate agency or if the financial burden has increased. Police Order (PO) 2002 separated investigation from operations, but every police organisation kept it under the operational command's control. Without investing in technology, training, and talent recruitment, CJS will continue struggling. As of Dec 31, 2023, the judiciary had 2,256,523 pending cases — 82 per cent at district level. According to researcher Ali Asghar, the overall conviction rate for heinous cases is 15pc — 20pc in Punjab; 10pc in Sindh; 12pc in KP; 24pc in Balochistan.

Chapter XI of PO 2002 focuses on district criminal justice coordination committees headed by district and sessions judges with representation from all CJS components, to increase trust and coordination. KP and Balochistan face terrorism; incorporating ATC judges in CJCCs will help raise conviction rates. CJCCs can be catalysts of change. CJS actors usually look outward, linking reform with financial and human resources instead of increasing existing resource efficiency and simplifying procedures. Reform must combine looking inward and outward.

> An effective criminal justice system evolves.

More participation in neighbourhood watch and community policing help prevent crime. Public input helps tailor CJS to meet public needs. Outreach programmes educate the public on laws, crime prevention, etc, while campaigns on cybercrime, street crime, drug abuse and domestic violence improve safety. Better public outreach will enhance access to CJS. When the public trusts CJS, it is likely to report crimes, volunteer as witnesses, and follow laws. Without transparency, misconduct goes unreported, so creating oversight is essential. In developing states, politicians prefer short-term wins over long-term structural changes. They must realise that peace and order are more crucial than physical development that can't materialise without a service-oriented CJS. ■

The writer is author of Pakistan: In Between Extremism and Peace.
X: @alibabakhel

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Week-long mourning

ISLAMABAD: "A beacon of Asia has been extinguished," said Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto today [Jan 9] as he led the nation into a week-long mourning for Chinese Premier Chou En-lai. Mr Bhutto, who ordered Pakistan National Flag at half-mast for three days, sent a condolence message to Chinese Vice-Premier Teng Hsiao-ping saying the late Chou En-lai's name would be honoured in the annals of history for his persistent efforts to promote international peace. In the death of Mr Chou, Pakistan has lost a "reliable friend", he said… .

… A grief-stricken Mr Bhutto drove … to the Chinese Embassy here as a mark of respect to the departed leader on the behalf of his Government and party and the people of Pakistan. "It is a great loss to us — you know that," he wrote in a special visitors' book. His daughter, Miss Benazir Bhutto, accompanied the Prime Minister, who spent 20 minutes at the Embassy, where, while talking to Ambassador Lu Wei-chao, he reminisced his memories with Premier Chou… . … The people of Pakistan heard with shock the news of Mr Chou En-lai's death in the … morning newspapers which published it with black borders under banner headlines. — News agencies

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

'Pakhtoonistan' issue

NEW DELHI: Pakistan is being threatened with war by Afghan propagandists, now active in the Bharati capital, where strenuous and frantic efforts are being made to make the so-called "Pakhtoonistan" a live issue. The centre of propaganda for the "Pakhtoonistan" stunt has, it appears, for the time being at least, been shifted from Kabul to Delhi. Bharati Press is devoting considerable space to reports from Kabul about the "Pakhtoonistan" stunt, and even responsible papers are coming out with special articles and editorials in support of Afghanistan's propaganda campaign against Pakistan.

The Afghan Ambassador to Bharat, Sardar Najibullah Khan, instead of keeping his country's relations with Bharat on friendly footings — which is his job as an ambassador — appears to be primarily acting as a propaganda chief for the "Pakhtoonistan" stunt.

What is more surprising and intriguing is this that he is not only allowed to propagate his country's stand in a most objectionable manner, but to make even anti-Pakistan speeches in public. This anti-Pakistan propaganda hit the peak when recently an "All-India Pakhtoon Jirga" was held in Delhi. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

Erratic Trump out to harm the world

THIS is with reference to the report 'US grabs Maduro in outrageous Venezuela raid' (Jan 4). In today's global map, it is difficult to find a country that has not been lectured by the United States on democracy, human rights and liberal values. Long regarded as self-acclaimed champion of democracy and liberalism, the US is now rewriting the global order with the red ink of realism.

The ideological successors of Woodrow Wilson — the founding father of liberal internationalism — are now blatantly abandoning the cherished legacy. Under Donald Trump, American foreign policy has sharply diverged from its proclaimed liberal foundations.

This shift in American policy, however, is not entirely new. The US has historically demonstrated a chameleon-like ability to switch its mask — from liberalism to realism — whenever its interests demand. Realism has always existed beneath the surface of American liberal rhetoric.

What is new, though, is technology: it has exposed the Big Brother behind the mask. Today, the gap between American discourse and practice is visible to the entire world.

The rather aggressive policy towards Venezuela has sent a clear message not only to Iran and Yemen, but also to all developing countries: survival in the international system depends solely on realism, self-help and balance of power.

Institutions, such as the United Nations, can do little more than issuing statements. International law, particularly Article 2(1) of the UN Charter, which guarantees the sovereign equality of states, stands openly violated.

The arrest or targeting of Venezuela's president has constituted a direct breach of its sovereignty and is a serious crime under international law.

Furthermore, recent American actions raise troubling questions about the politicisation of the Nobel Peace Prize. Many political philosophers have argued that the Peace Prize has often functioned as an instrument of US soft power. In 2025, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Venezuelan opposition political leader Maria Corina Machado. When soft power failed to produce the desired outcome in Venezuela, Washington shifted to a harder approach in the shape of coercion and military pressure. This transition marks the failure of liberalism, and has exposed its conditional and selective nature.

Trump's militarised interventions do not merely signal the decline of the liberal world order or international law; they also threaten democracy within the US itself. The expanding and unchecked use of presidential powers undermines constitutional norms and weakens democratic institutions at home.

Consider a hypothetical scenario: if Russia had captured Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, and his wife, the West would have unanimously condemned the act as a violation of international law and national sovereignty. But, when the violator happens to be the US itself, the interpretation changes.

Such an erratic, 'Trumpian' behaviour is creating a strategic vacuum. Developing countries are increasingly turning towards Russia and China for security guarantees. If China attacks Taiwan tomorrow, on what moral or legal grounds would the US and the European Union condemn Beijing? The so-called 'rules-based international order' is rapidly eroding, and its collapse will ultimately harm the US the most.

Zahid Marri
Kohlu

Garbage dumping

FOR several months now, the continuous dumping of municipal waste in Islamabad's sector I-11 has resulted in a persistent foul smell that spreads across the entire locality. This situation has not only made daily living extremely uncomfortable; it has also created serious health concerns for thousands of families residing in the I-10 sector as well.

The open accumulation of garbage, without proper segregation, treatment or disposal, is causing severe air pollution and the spread of insects and disease-carrying pests. Children, the elderly citizens and individuals with respiratory issues are the worst affected, as toxic fumes and unhygienic environment are contributing to allergies, breathing difficulties and other health complications. The problem becomes even more intense during the evening and early morning hours when the stench becomes unbearable.

Despite a number of complaints from concerned citizens, no visible action has been taken by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI), or the relevant environmental bodies to address the issue. The ad hoc practice of dumping waste in residential surroundings is in violation of basic municipal duties and undermines the constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment.

The CDA and MCI as well as the Pakistan Environmental Protection Agency should immediately relocate the waste-dumping site away from residential areas, introduce proper waste-management mechanisms, ensure daily sanitation, and explore environmentally safe disposal methods, such as composting, recycling as well as engineered landfills.

Regular monitoring and public communication are essential elements to restore the quality of life for the area residents.

Asad Ullah Taimur Muhmand
Islamabad

Promising features

THE Capital Development Authority (CDA) has introduced new technological features for passengers using the Blue and Green Line metro buses as well as the electric buses on feeder routes across Islamabad. The latest update in the CDA Metro app now enables commuters to track buses live in real-time, helping them plan their journeys more conveniently, and avoid long waits at bus stations. The app displays accurate locations, estimated arrival times, and route details, offering a smoother commuting experience for thousands of daily passengers.

Another notable addition is the cashless payment system. Through this feature, passengers can top up their online metro accounts using credit or debit cards and pay fares by simply scanning a QR code displayed on the fare validator machines installed inside the buses. This system eliminates the need for cash transactions, promoting a faster, more hygienic, and transparent method of fare collection.

However, despite the system being live and functional, many passengers have reported that staff are unaware or untrained about these new digital services.

In fact, in several instances, commuters attempting to pay via the QR code system face confusion or are asked to pay in cash instead. Public transport users appreciate the CDA's efforts to modernise Islamabad's metro bus system, but there seems to be a need to conduct proper staff trainings.

The initiative represents an important step towards a smart and sustainable transport network in the federal capital, but for the programme to succeed, consistent training, monitoring and user education are rather essential elements.

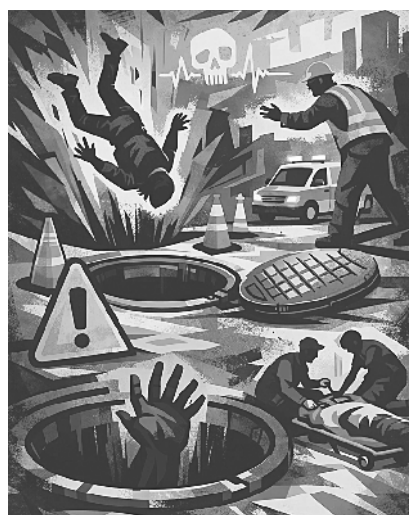
Muhammad Anfal
Islamabad

Manhole management

KARACHI last year lost 24 lives to the city's neglected sewers, manholes and drains. Eleven people died after falling into open drains and nullahs, seven fell into uncovered manholes, and six sanitation workers were effectively killed by a system that forced them to enter and clean toxic, clogged raw sewage gutters with their bare hands.

It ought to be difficult, if not impossible, for all of us who live in this country to identify ourselves as human beings while silently watching these orchestrated and exploited deaths of fellow humans — with such utter cruelty and inhumanity. We could, however, reform this dilapidated and brutal governance system by taking at least three immediate steps.

There should be a survey to count and digitise every storm-water and sewage gutter and manhole across the city, and allocate a unique identity code that identifies location, type (storm-water,



wastewater, combined sewer), depth, size, pipe connections, material, installation date and the owner department.

Before the Sindh government senses another opportunity for 'tragedy capitalism' to obtain and blow up a fresh $50 million World Bank loan under the pretext of streamlining the system, it may be appropriate to publicly state that open-source geographic information system (GIS) desktop softwares, such as QGIS and Map Window GIS, are available for free, for anyone to use for the management of manholes, storm drains, sewerage pipes and gutters. The Sindh government should enact legislation banning all forms of manual scavenging, and prohibiting workers from entering hazardous sewage gutters.

The current practices are inhumane, violate fundamental human rights, and need to be replaced by modern systems.

Naeem Sadiq
Karachi

▶ **HOTEL MAFIA:** Hotels along highways and motorways have turned into mafia businesses that charge exorbitant sums against their services. They thrive in the absence of state oversight, squeezing the already poor passengers of their meagre resources. The tragedy is that transporters work in collusion with the owners of these hotels, whereby the drivers and the staff of transport companies savour free meals in addition to getting some cash. When the passengers complain, which they hardly do, nothing happens. This is hardly surprising in the absence of state regulations. Unless these mafias are made to fear the consequences of their unjust actions, the passengers will continue to suffer.
Muhammad Ilyas Mandokhail
Zhob

▶ **BANK ROBBERIES:** Bank robberies have become a recurring issue across all cities in Balochistan. However, Turbat and Panjgur have repeatedly emerged as the most targeted areas. A bank cash vehicle carrying a large amount of money in Turbat was recently attacked by armed robbers who managed to seize over Rs200 million. This shocking incident exposed the vulnerability of even heavily-guarded cash movements. Besides, three banks were recently looted simultaneously in Panjgur, raising further concerns among the account holders. As such, the robbers reportedly escaped with more than Rs1.5 billion. Such prevailing lawlessness shows poor security arrangements, and emboldens criminal elements.
Hasil Wahid
Turbat

▶ **UNBEARABLE STENCH:** Gilgit city, once known for its cleanliness and natural beauty, is bound to turn into a foul-smelling urban centre due to the ongoing Gilgit-Baltistan sewerage project. It seems like those at the helm of affairs want to compel the residents to move out of the city because of unbearable stench. Whether this is a deliberate attempt to push people out, or sheer incompetence and poor planning, the outcome is the same. The project must be stopped or to be carried out with due diligence.
Salman Rushdi
Gilgit

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
Email: dawnombudsman@gmail.com